



In Tennessee, Thirty Years of Success

For more than 30 years, the Endangered Species Act has helped prevent the extinction of our national treasures. Because of the act, beloved symbols of America such as the bald eagle and the peregrine falcon are thriving, and species native to Tennessee such as mussels and threatened freshwater fish are recovering due to habitat conservation efforts.

Only nine of the 1,800 species protected by the act have been declared extinct since its passage in 1973. Such an astonishing success rate makes the act a true symbol of our nation's commitment to protecting our natural heritage for future generations. It is also an example of the progress that can be made when communities work together to conserve their local wildlife and habitat. With the participation of communities, business and government, less than one percent of development projects reviewed under the act have been halted, proving that we can conserve wildlife without sacrificing progress. With the creation of jobs from tourism and outdoor recreation related to endangered species, it can truly be said that people all over Tennessee benefit from the act.

Tennessee is rich with native plant and animal life and, with more than 4,000 species, is ranked one of the top 10 richest states in America for biological diversity. Yet it is also ranked among the most threatened in the nation due to loss of natural areas. Tennessee currently has 95 endangered and threatened species (70 animals and 25 plants).

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Freshwater Mussels

Freshwater mussels provide immense biological benefits as they filter water in streams and rivers as part of their feeding process. Tennessee's rivers represent the global center of mussel diversity. But these important creatures are among the most fragile and easily threatened by changes in river flows, pollution and development. Today, Tennessee is leading the charge to save these inhabitants of its waterways. For instance, once depleted to the brink of extinction, the tan riffleshell mussel was raised in captivity over a number of years and recently released into the Hiwassee River through a partnership between government agencies and universities. Endangered mussels in two other tributaries of the Hiwassee have also been augmented with captive-bred mussels. Biologists are hopeful that the populations can become sustainable and work their cleansing magic on Tennessee's rivers for decades to come.

Duskytail Darter, Smoky Madtom, Yellowfin Madtom, Spottfin Chub

Fifty years ago, the future of these four fish was not bright at all. All four species were nearly eliminated, primarily by loss of habitat due to dam construction on the Tennessee and Little Tennessee Rivers. Then a last bastion of the madtoms and one of the few remaining places supporting all four species, Abrams Creek in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, was poisoned to reclaim it for trout.

Since the mid-1980s, Conservation Fisheries, Inc., a Knoxville nonprofit that specializes in the propagation and preservation of rare fishes, has been working to reintroduce these four species into Abrams Creek. With support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the National Park Service, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Tennessee Valley Authority, and Tennessee Aquarium, three of the species, the duskytail darter, smoky madtom and yellowfin madtom are now thriving in the creek.

A similar reintroduction effort is now underway in a 10-mile stretch of the Tellico River above the backwaters of the Tellico Reservoir where suitable habitat for all four fish has been identified. Spottfin chub are also being released in Shoal Creek in Lawrence County. These reintroduced fish are classified as nonessential experimental populations under the Endangered Species Act. This designation fully protects them from intentional harm, but keeps their presence from restricting current and future land management practices. This means state, federal and local construction and other projects can proceed even as these species are being restored to Tennessee's rivers, testimony to the flexibility of the Endangered Species Act.

The American Eagle Foundation in Tennessee

When Europeans first arrived on the North American continent in the 1600s, there were an estimated 100,000 bald eagles, but populations have since dropped for many reasons. The bald eagle declined throughout

the United States due to human disturbance at nest sites; loss of habitat; poaching; and contamination by pesticides such as DDT. By 1963, only 417 nesting pairs were found in the lower 48 states. In 1973, the bald eagle was listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The American Eagle Foundation, located in Pigeon Forge, is a not-for-profit organization of concerned citizens and professionals founded in 1985 to conduct bald eagle recovery programs in the United States and to assist private, state and federal eagle projects. The foundation is dedicated to caring for eagles that are injured and orphaned and handles more than 60 birds of prey daily. The American Eagle Foundation also breeds bald eagles to provide eaglets for recovery projects. The foundation has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on most of the 294 bald eaglet releases at seven Tennessee sites. Since 1992, the foundation has released 80 captive-hatched eaglets into the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains area alone. At Reelfoot Lake, bald eagle tours generate more than \$2 million annually for the state's economy.

Economic Benefits of Protecting Wildlife and Habitat

Ecotourism represents a huge economic force in the country. Each year, millions of Americans travel and pay to view wildlife and take in all that nature has to offer. Much of this activity takes place on the hundreds of national wildlife refuges spread across the country. Nationwide, visits to wildlife refuges generated more than \$1.3 billion in income for local and state economies and an additional \$150 million in tax revenues. Indeed, national wildlife refuges received nearly twice as many visitors in 2004 than Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Acadia, Grand Teton, and Statue of Liberty national parks combined. And the vast majority of those visitors came from outside the area, further testament to the ability of these special places to draw people and dollars to a region.

In Tennessee alone, the Tennessee

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Bald eagle

National Wildlife Refuge in the northwestern part of the state generated \$12.2 million in economic activity for the local area, and the West Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge generated an additional \$6 million.

For more information on the success of the Endangered Species Act, please visit www.saveesa.org.



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